



Volleyball ACE™ Power Tips

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Training the VBIQ

By Larry Smith, a USAV-CAP Level II accredited coach with Burnsville Thunder Volleyball Club in Burnsville, Minn.

One of the remarkable qualities of volleyball is how fun the game can be for such a diverse range of athletes. In many respects, it is self-leveling. In other words, the game itself adapts to the level of the participants.

Nearly everyone is familiar with the classic style of the picnic pick-up volleyball games, with serve and return volleys that most closely resemble tennis. When individual ball control skills allow, the game moves into the “let’s try to set it up” phase. This level of play requires no team systems and no prior organization, which makes it quite suitable for most recreational players.

Indeed, there are millions of people who enjoy volleyball at this level. But even the casual observer will notice how the game favors those who deploy even basic tactics and team strategies. This is the point where the game changes most: when the smart can defeat the strong.

At its core, volleyball is restricted by earth’s laws of physics. Every player, from playground novice to Olympic champion, requires gravity to draw the ball to the floor. Velocity, inertia and energy define the limits. The game favors the mathematically inclined, who understand geometry and probability. All the science boils down to one simple and irrefutable law of volleyball: every core skill of the game can be performed better by a player in the proper position. Every extra reach, shift and adjustment reduces your efficiency.

Add this perspective: one genie, one bottle and three wishes. After your new iPhone and the plasma TV come the really hard choices. Would you prefer 3 more inches of vertical or the ability always to know where the ball is going next? The gift of premonition sure makes blocking easier, not to mention serve receive. Setting becomes a lot less dicey if you always know where the pass is going.

Such prognostication is often referred to as a player’s volleyball IQ (VBIQ). For most, the VBIQ matures at a different pace than most physical skills, in part because it is solely acquired over many years of watching random plays unfold. The patterns and tendencies can be so subtle that one would have to witness hundreds of attempts to recognize a repeating pattern. In many cases, the progress is slowed because the player is not actively looking for these kinds of clues. The active discovery process does not begin without some moment of epiphany – that point when a player realizes, “I need to pay attention because this stuff is important.” I believe that moment should be emphasized by

volleyball coaches at a very early stage of player development. Clearly, the effects of physical skills are greatly enhanced when combined with an elevated VBIQ. So train VBIQ right along with the physical skills. It adds relevance and heightens awareness.



According to the author, teaching VBIQ means teaching the player in serve receive to observe the opposing server’s toss to get a clearer idea of where the ball will land on your side of the court. Photo courtesy of FIVB.

For example, when teaching a player to serve, we give a lot of attention to the toss. "You must toss the ball to this spot every time." Now extend the lesson. "When your toss drifts too far to center, what happens? Your serve goes left." "When your toss gets too low, what happens? The serve flattens out." Transfer this knowledge directly into serve receive training. As a defender, watch the server's toss. If the point of contact moves, you now have a better idea of how to adjust. Your VBIQ gets you closer to the ball before your feet are even engaged.

There is an abundance of resources dedicated to the physical training of volleyball athletes. One is hard-pressed to find training aids for VBIQ. On-the-job training is the best most players can hope for. So what can you do to pull your team ahead of the VBIQ learning curve? Many of your tried and true practice drills can easily be adapted to VBIQ drills. Simply change the focus to observing the visual clues. It may sound remarkably counter-intuitive, but you must first reduce a player's focus on the ball. The flight of the ball tells the story of where the ball has been. There are many more revealing clues that better predict the future. Remember, the value of VBIQ comes from knowing what will come next while others simply respond to what has happened.

One common trait of the VBIQ elite is the ability to bring into focus the player who will play the next ball. Once the ball is in motion, there is little to be gained from watching its flight. Nothing will change its course and speed, which makes its destination quite predictable. The next player in the series can tell you a lot more about the future. Is this player in a good position to play this next touch? If the player has arrived to his/her position early and is displaying a calm and confident demeanor, that player probably has a wider array of options open to him/her. If this player is a setter, you can watch how he/she takes inventory of the hitters and observes the blockers preparing. The location and tempo of the set can often be deduced at this early stage of preparation. If nothing else, one can determine with a high degree of confidence where the set will not be going. If you are a hitter and want that next set, this is your clue to start calling for the ball. If you are a blocker or digger, you now have much less court to cover.

One of the unique challenges of VBIQ training is the lack of metrics. How can a coach tell that the player was actually watching and processing the correct information? The most effective way is to ask the player to verbalize his/her thought processes as they occur. Ask the player to do a live play-by-play while the action is underway and listen to what is being said. You can quickly tell if both the focus and interpretation are accurate. If you have video tape equipment, position the players next to the microphone. You can later replay the moment, along with the player's commentary, for review.

Another significant benefit of practicing verbalization is how well it translates into game-time court talk. A high VBIQ player can become an effective court leader whose voice guides the rest of the team. Others will learn to recognize for themselves the same clues your VBIQ leader is describing. One active mind connected to a loud, clear voice can produce far more VBIQ training than many hours of drills.

For those of us beyond VB ping-pong, yet not quite destined for the Olympic Games, VBIQ training has a far better chance of improving our game than trying to overcome many generations of genetic predispositions. If you are one of the many not born to 6-foot-something parents, try a little training for the brain.

CALENDAR

- Oct. 11** **Volleyball Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony**
Holyoke, Mass.
- Oct. 12-14** **Volleyball Hall of Fame High School Showcase of Champions**
Holyoke Community College, Holyoke Mass.
- Oct. 19-20** **Volleyball Hall of Fame Women's Tournament**
Smith, Mount Holyoke, Holyoke Community and Amherst Colleges
- Nov. 2-16** **FIVB Women's World Cup**
Various Cities, Japan
- Nov. 18-Dec. 2** **FIVB Men's World Cup**
Various Cities, Japan
- Dec. 12-15** **AVCA Annual Convention**
Sacramento Convention Center
Sacramento, Calif.
- Dec. 16** **AVCA Talent Showcase**
Sacramento Convention Center Hall C
Sacramento, Calif.

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VOLLEYBALL ACE™ DRILLS

Team Defense vs. Coach

101 Winning Volleyball Drills From the AVCA (2000)

Number of Players: 6
Number of Balls: Steady supply

Objective:

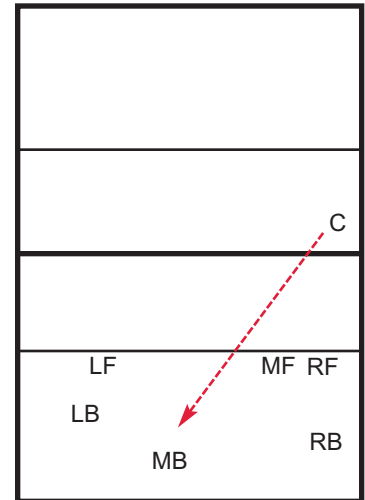
This is a controlled drill that allows for excellent teaching of exact defense situations. Proper positioning is required on each play and gives the coach the opportunity to repeat exact situations.

Directions:

1. The coach (C) attacks balls against a team of players.
2. The players must play good defense and convert

the transition to attack successfully.

3. Players should be rotated frequently. Play continues for a predetermined amount of time or a certain number of successful attacks.



The Pit

Al Scates, UCLA (from Complete Conditioning for Volleyball, 2003)

Number of Players: 6 to 12
Number of Balls: 12

Objective:

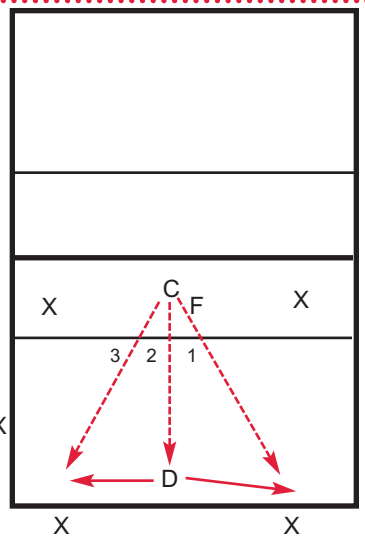
To test the limits of a player's defensive capabilities.

Directions:

1. The digger (D) is surrounded by peers (X) who have just gone through or will go through the drill.
2. The coach (C) hits balls near the player in a rapid fashion, causing the player to dive, roll, sprawl and grovel to dig everything possible.
3. The object is to condition the player to attempt

to dig every ball, not to make judgments, but to react quickly.

4. The player's teammates shag and encourage the digger.
5. To extend the player's range, alternate balls (1, 2, 3) spiked just out of range interspersed with balls within reach.



Receive Serve, Attack and Cover

Joe Sagula, University of North Carolina

Number of Players: 12
Number of Balls: Steady supply

Objective:

To work on basic serve receive, preparing to attack after receiving serve and coverage of hitters.

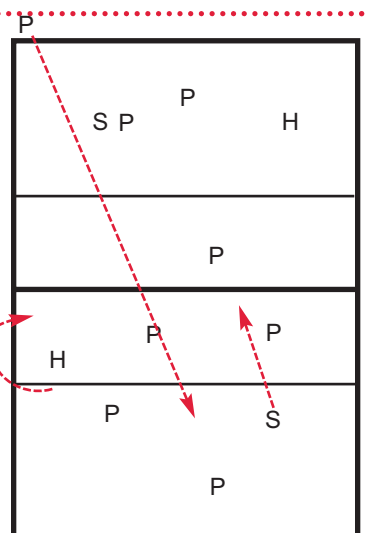
Directions:

1. From one side of the court, players serve to the opposite side.
2. The non-serving side begins in its serve receive pattern (two-, three- or four-person receive).
3. The setter (S) penetrates into the target area after the serve.

4. The passers (P) on the receiving team communicate with the setter and pass to the target.
5. The setter sets to a specified hitter (H), who attacks the ball, while remaining players cover the hitter.
6. Goals are determined for each rotation and are specified by the coach.

Variations:

1. The setter sets only outside hitters, only the passer, only the non-passer, only the quick-attack hitter, only the back-court hitter, and so on.
2. Score the drill by awarding points for running particular plays or sets.



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Volleyball

Software for Coaches

Version 6

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